A STUDY ON THE INFLUENCE OF EWOM PLATFORM CHARACTERISTICS ON THE PERCEIVED USEFULNESS AND SUBSEQUENT PURCHASE DECISION OF MILLENNIALS WITH REFERENCE TO HOTEL INDUSTRY

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the development of new web applications has shifted the features of websites toward more participative, interactive, and user-centric social media (or electronic word of mouth platforms in this study). The term electronic word of mouth platforms (eWOM platforms) denote "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations that allow creating and exchanging User Generated Content" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The explosive growth of the eWOM channels such as social networking sites, blogs, content communities, forums/bulletin boards, and other interactive applications (Minazzi, 2015) has transformed many consumers' interactions with each other and businesses of all kinds.

The eWOM platforms have changed the game rules for companies trying to understand consumer behaviours (Arora and Sanni, 2018). The statistics show that the rapid increase in the eWOM platform's usage globally has reached from 2.86 billion users in 2017 to 3.6 billion in 2020, with the numbers likely to increase to 4.41 billion by 2025 (Statista, 2021). However, the growth in the rise of the digital population in India has been seen moving at a faster pace with over 518 million active web users, with Indian spending around 2.25 hours on the different eWOM platforms daily. The main reasons behind the growth rate of the eWOM platform users is due to more internet subscribers and their higher web usage rate, backed by the government initiative of making the country "Digital India" (Statista, 2021).

The millennial generation is quite a popular cohort among various generational cohorts since they are well educated and highly active in eWOM platforms. This generation accounts for 1.8 billion people worldwide which constitutes approximately 23% of the global population. In India, the millennials population accounts for nearly 440 million people, out of which 33% of the population lives in urban areas. They constitute around 40% of the total urban population of India

(IMRB, 2019), which generate 71% of income from the household (Ahluwalia, 2018). Millennials or Generation Y are the population group born between 1980-2000 (Choudhary and Gangotia, 2017). This generation is considerably different from the previous generation as the population is blessed to get raised in a technologically advanced era (Bhargava, 2017), due to which the generation is also popularly known as digital natives. They are habitual to smartphones (Deloitte, 2018) and access various eWOM platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Linked In and many more. The digital natives seek varieties and are more likely to create active groups to actively participate in various discussions (Dehghani et al., 2016). They prefer to share their experiences and opinions with others in the form of e-comments, e-reviews and e-feedback related to products and services purchase and consumption (Hamed, 2017). For decision making, millennials prefer to read reviews of other users rather than company information (Appel et al., 2020; Krishna, 2018). Even though they use digital channels to gather information about various products, many do not purchase online (Krishna, 2018). The millennials rely heavily on peer suggestions and can influence others significantly due to their strong interconnectivity (Hall and Towers, 2017).

Previous studies on the use of the eWOM platform networks by millennial travellers for their travel planning search have got intense attention (Xiang et al., 2015), with most of the studies focusing on the characteristics of the millennial (Jain and Viswanathan, 2015); and their motivation to use eWOM platforms (Dabija et al., 2018). The millennial generation is the most significant and heterogeneous market segment with high-potential tourists who prefer spending their earnings on travel (UNWTO, 2008). This creates the need to understand how they make purchase decisions for hotel products and services. Furthermore, the present study also identifies the moderating impact of the gender on the relationship between various constructs.

2. Objectives of the research

The following objectives are defined in relation to the research gaps and research questions indicated previously:

1. To identify various characteristics of the eWOM platforms that motivate the millennials to indulge.
2. To evaluate the influence of eWOM platform characteristics on their perceived usefulness.
3. To evaluate the influence of the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms on the purchase decision of millennials.
4. To analyse the moderating role of gender on the relationship between the eWOM platform characteristics, perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms, and purchase decision of the millennials.

3. Literature review and hypothesis development

3.1 The S-O-R theory

The theory of Stimulus Organism Response (commonly known as SOR or S-O-R model) was first discussed in "Dynamic Psychology" book in 1929 by Robert S. Woodworth. The S-O-R theory states that individuals react to any environment based on either approach or averting behaviour. All constructive actions, such as a desire to explore, stay, affiliate, or work, are reflected in the approach behaviour. On the other hand, averting behaviour embraces the opposite actions, including the desire not to act positively (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). Wohlwill (1976) relates the S-O-R framework with the sentimental attributes of surroundings commonly known as aesthetic stimuli. Bitner (1992) redefines the theory by incorporating two additional determinants, i.e., cognition and physiology, to study its application in the servicescape. Later on, Jacoby (2002)

redefines the model by integrating cognitive and affective systems that implicate long-term memory.

The S-O-R framework works around stimulus, organism and response. The stimulus factors include all the external factors such as marketing mix and environment inputs that affect the individuals' internal state, leading to their behavioural responses (Bagozzi, 1986). The organismic factors state the environment where individuals process the stimulus factors subconsciously. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) characterise the organism factor as an intervening process between stimuli and responses from the customers. The reason for choosing this framework in our study is its wide acceptance in consumer behaviour research in various contexts (Jacoby, 2002), including eWOM. Based on the framework, we study the six characteristics of the eWOM platform as the stimulus. The perceived usefulness of the eWOM platforms is considered as the organism. Finally, the response denotes to purchase decision of the millennials in India in context to various products and services of the hotel.

The following section addresses the creation of hypotheses for the study after a comprehensive research evaluation.

3.2 Information quality

The information quality refers to "the persuasive strength of information embedded in an information message on various eWOM platforms for the use of various potential customers" (Bhattacherjee and Clive Sanford, 2006). The customer focuses on eWOM information through eWOM websites based on its influence (M. Cheung et al., 2009). Hwang et al. (2018) proposed that the information quality available in the information system directly impacts user satisfaction and system use behaviour. Previous studies have found the significant influence of information quality on the perceived usefulness of a website (Matute et al., 2016) and online community (Park

et al., 2014). The information quality in the eWOM platform is defined by its format, relevancy, accuracy, comprehensive and timely updates, which might cause millennial travellers to perceive the usefulness of a website. Thus, we argue that:

H1. The quality of information available on the eWOM platform is positively associated with the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms.

3.3 Source credibility

The eWOM communication can be measured through source credibility (Akyüz, 2013), which generates confidence and reduces the risk level related to travel decisions (Serra Cantallops and Salvi, 2014). Source credibility states "consumer's overall perception regarding the credibility of the eWOM source rather than the content of the message" (Akyüz, 2013). Millennials travellers prefer to pursue user-generated content, i.e. information shared by peers, family, against company generated content for making any travel-related decision (Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012). Previous literature has discovered the influence of eWOM platforms on customers' accommodation booking (Zhao et al., 2015). Additionally, a higher degree of expertise and trustworthiness improves the importance of source credibility(Zha et al., 2018), which increases the usefulness of the comments and review generating platforms (Au and Ayeh, 2013) and applications (Fard and Marvi, 2019). Therefore, the current study proposes:

H2. The source's credibility is positively associated with the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms.

3.4 Perceived curiosity fulfilment

Curiosity fulfilment shows a person's cognitive inquiry in search of a novel acquaintance (Agarwal and Karahanna, 2000). The eWOM platform involvement may assist the customers to satisfy their curiosity level as websites facilitate them to get acquainted with various forms of information shared by colleagues, unknown people, and companies (Hu et al., 2014). The curiosity satisfaction of an individual influences the purchase behaviour under unclear settings (Dijk and Zeelenberg, 2007), e.g. when making hotel accommodation choices. Previous studies have found the significant impact of curiosity fulfilment on the perceived usefulness of the internet (Agarwal and Karahanna, 2000). The information available on the eWOM platform related to hotel products and services aids vast information quantity in terms of photographs, manuscripts, and videos, resulting in curiosity fulfilment towards a new expedition. Thus, we may deduce that millennials' belief towards the eWOM platform usefulness increases with the fulfilment of their curiosity. Accordingly it is propsed that:

H3. Perceived curiosity fulfilment regarding the use of the eWOM platform is positively associated with the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms.

3.5 Enjoyment

Venkatesh et al. (2000) define the term enjoyment as the degree to which interacting with an information system contributes to pleasure, happiness, and flow for any medium regardless of its anticipated consequence after using it. According to Davis, Bagozzi and Warshaw (1992), perceived enjoyment is a dimension of intrinsic motivation which leads to the perceived usefulness (i.e. extrinsic motivation) of technology. Several types of research have investigated the influence of perceived enjoyment in information and communication technology, such as the perceived usefulness of Moodle (Padilla-meléndez et al., 2013) and online shopping websites (Visinescu et

al., 2015) as well as customer attitude (Otieno et al., 2016). The pleasure and enjoyment that millennial travellers attain while searching for information may lead to the perception of its usefulness and generating source. Therefore, it is proposed that:

H4. Enjoyment of using the eWOM platform is positively associated with the perceived usefulness of eWOM Platforms.

3.6 Visual presentation

Visual information can range from simple charts, graphs, and photos (Adaval et al., 2018) to video presentations (Flavián et al., 2017). Images impact viewers' perceptions by influencing emotional and intellectual processing of the subject matter (Thatcher et al., 2018), whereas high-quality video clips seize the users' attention. The presentation format of online reviews on the eWOM platform has a substantive and nuanced impact on consumer perceptions (Xu et al., 2015), especially in generation Y (Morgan et al., 2010). According to Ahn et al. (2004), the visual presentation feature of a website has a positive effect on its perceived usefulness. Wu, Chiu and Chen (2020) find the significant impact of visual presentation on the perceived usefulness of technology in the context of tourism. Moreover, media richness theory (Dennis and Kinney, 1998), applied in the information system context, shows that multiple cues and richer presentation allow the recipients to understand the message better and perceive it as more credible and valuable. Thus, it is hypothesised that

H5: The visual presentation style of the eWOM platform is positively associated with the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms.

3.7 Perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness

The technology acceptance model (TAM) proposes two determinants, i.e. perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness, influencing individuals' attitude and intention toward the system

usage (Davis, 1989). Researchers have used original TAM in studying different fields related to technology, marketing, hospitality and tourism and have confirmed the importance of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness determinants towards the use the information technology (Ayeh, 2015). In anticipation of using the eWOM platforms, the usage benefits get overlooked when the digital generation finds it challenging to use. In this situation, the desire to utilise that particular platform may be limited (Chinje and Chinomona, 2018). Since perceived ease of use influences the perceived usefulness of a website and perceived usefulness strongly influences users' intention to use a system for decision making (Herrero and San Martín, 2012), it is appropriate to consider both variables to predict millennials' acceptance of the eWOM platform and subsequent decision making. Thus, it is proposed that:

H6: Perceived ease of use of the eWOM platform is positively associated with the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms.

H7: Perceived usefulness of the eWOM platforms positively leads to purchase decision.

3.8 The moderating effect of gender

The role of gender in people's behaviour has been described in various studies. Gender should be measured to attain a better and more comprehensive understanding of information technology and the subsequent consequences (A. Adam, 2004). As a moderator, the term gender reveals vital information to showcase the importance of a particular category (Ramírez-Correa et al., 2015). The present study assumes that the relationship between independent factors and dependent factors will be moderated by gender. The result findings would be an indicator to understand the different decision-making mechanism among millennials in the context of eWOM platforms. Therefore, the following sub-hypotheses are generated:

H8a: Gender moderates the relationship between information quality and the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms.

H8b: Gender moderates the relationship between source credibility and the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms.

H8c: Gender moderates the relationship between perceived curiosity fulfilment and the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms.

H8d: Gender moderates the relationship between enjoyment and the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms.

H8e: Gender moderates the relationship between visual presentation and the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms.

H8f: Gender moderates the relationship between perceived ease of use and the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms.

H8g: Gender moderates the relationship between the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms and the purchase decision of millennials by gender.

Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual model.

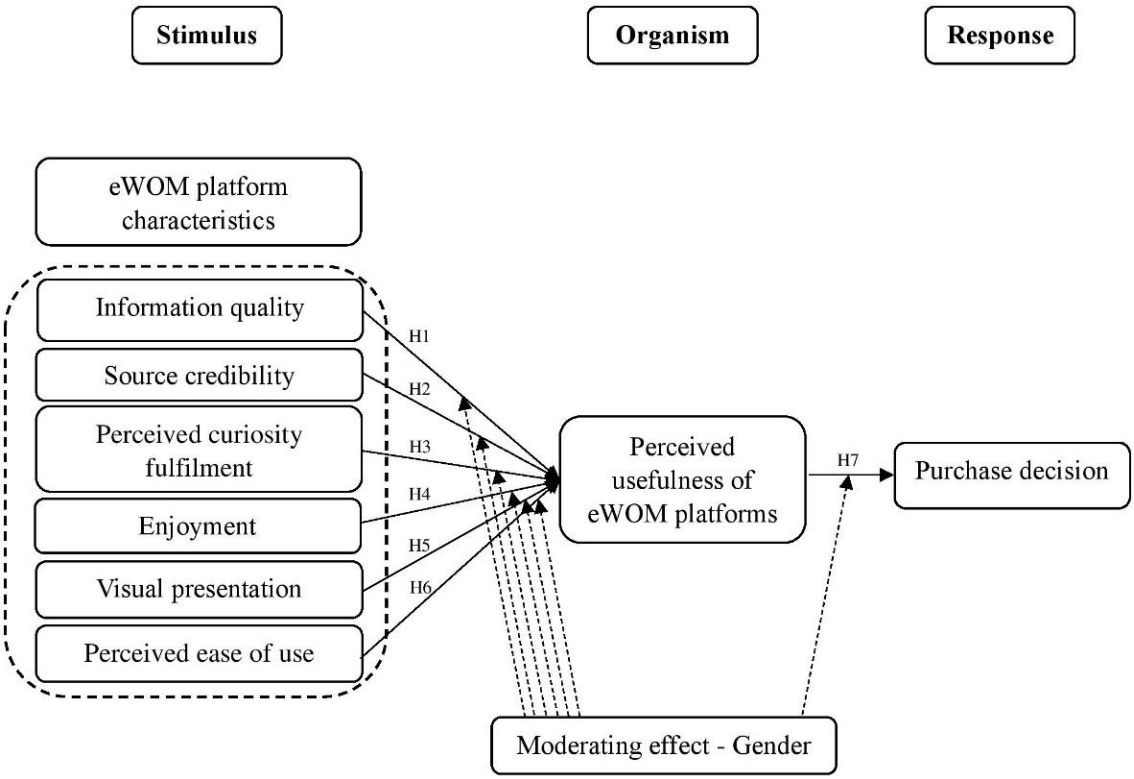


Figure 1: Proposed research conceptual model

4. Research methodology

4.1 Type of research

The current study employs descriptive research to accomplish the study's purpose. The objective of descriptive research is to investigate the causal relationship between specified constructs. Additionally, it quantifies the degree to which independent factors are related to dependent variables. Thus, the present study measures the relationship of characteristics of eWOM platforms with millennials' purchase decisions in the presence of cognitive behaviour, i.e. perceived usefulness.

4.2 The survey technique

The survey technique is based on 'questioning respondents,' who can be questioned verbally, in writing, or via the internet (Malhotra & Das, 2010). Through a survey-based approach, one can make inferences about the population based on the analysis done by ascertaining the quantitative description of the respondents' behaviour, attitude, and opinion.

Before initialising the survey, the researcher developed a conceptual framework based on an extensive literature review. The conceptual framework outlines the expected relationships between variously identified constructs. Following that, a survey was designed to collect data for testing the model and related hypotheses.

4.3 Target population

The target population for the present study includes millennials (Generation Y) in India, falling into the age bracket between 21 to 40 years old.

4.4 Sampling technique

The sampling technique used in the current study is purposive sampling. The questionnaire of those millennials got accepted who checked reviews on the eWOM platforms before making any purchase decision for hotel products and services.

4.5 Sample size justification

There are different ways of calculating the sample size. Grossnickle (2001) suggests that the sample size should truly represent the target population and should be large enough in number to minimise the chance of sampling error. The present study uses the sample size calculation formula prescribed by Godden (2004) for an infinite population. A population can be defined as an infinite population when the number exceeds fifty thousand. The formulae is as follows:

$$\mathbf{SS} = \frac{\mathbf{Z^2 * P\ (1\text{-}P)}}{\mathbf{C^2}}$$

Where,

SS = Sample size
Z = Z-value
P = Estimated proportion of the population (expressed in decimal)
C = margin of error or confidence interval

The study undertakes a confidence interval of $^{+}$/- 5 percentage points. The confidence level in the study is 95 per cent, for which the z-value scores 1.96. The population proportion is 50 per cent, i.e., 0.5.

$$SS = \frac{(1.96)^2 * 0.5\ (1\text{-}0.5)}{(.05)^2}$$

$$SS = \frac{3.8416 * 0.25}{.0025}$$

SS = 384.16 (minimum required sample)

4.6 Actual sample size

A survey questionnaire was distributed among seven hundred millennial respondents through different online platforms such as email, WhatsApp, Facebook, and LinkedIn. After a five-month period of regular follow-up, five hundred and seven responses were received, out of which four hundred and seventy-six responses were finally considered for further analysis. Thirty-one responses were rejected since they did not fulfil the prescribed eligibility.

4.7 Measurement development

The questionnaire related to the present study comprised two sections: The first section covers the question related to demographic profiles and investigates the millennials respondent's understanding of the eWOM platform usage and their preferred source for the purchase of hotel products and services. The second section includes various characteristics of the eWOM platform, i.e., information quality, source credibility, ease of use, perceived curiosity fulfilment, enjoyment, and visual presentation. This section also covers the perceived usefulness of the eWOM platforms and purchase decisions related to hotel products and services. The items for each construct were adapted from the previous studies having high reliability and validity checks, which were further modified as per the context of the study. The measurement scale of information quality was adapted from Wixom and Todd (2005) and Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn (2008). The scale used by Bhattacherjee and Clive Sanford (2006) in their study was adapted for measuring source credibility. The visual presentation was measured by adapting the measurement scale of Yi, Jiang

and Benbasat (2015). The scales related to enjoyment, perceived curiosity fulfilment, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness were adapted from the study of Agarwal and Karahanna (2000). Finally, the purchase decision was measured by taking the measurement scale of Lee and Lee (2009) and Hsu, Chang and Chen (2012). All constructs were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to agree strongly, where one denotes strongly disagree, and five denotes strongly agree.

4.8 Data collection

The data were collected in two stages: In the first stage, a pilot study was conducted on 50 millennial participants before going for the second round of data collection. During pilot testing, the respondents were asked to give feedback about the survey questionnaire. Secondly, after specific revisions in construct items, the structured questionnaires were circulated among the millennials to collect the data.

All questions were marked compulsory in the questionnaire to avoid any missing values.

4.9 Research tools

The software used for the current study includes the Statistical package for social sciences (IBM SPSS, version 23) and Analysis of Moment Structures (IBM AMOS, version 23). The data input and preliminary analysis have been done through SPSS. The Structural equation modelling (SEM) technique was used to evaluate the proposed research model and hypothesis. Further, the structure model's testing and its validity were checked through the IBM AMOS software application.

5. Data analysis and results

5.1 Demographic variables analysis

Table 1 displays the result on different demographic variables such as gender, age and education qualification.

Table 1: Distribution chart of demographic profile

Gender

Category	N:476	Frequency (in %)
Male	239	50.21%
Female	237	49.78%

Age groups

Intervals	N:476	Frequency (in %)
21-25 yrs.	196	41.17%
26-30 yrs.	126	26.47%
31-35 yrs.	90	18.90%
36-40 yrs.	64	13.44%

Education

Category	N:476	Frequency (in %)
Under-graduate	124	26.05%
Post-graduate	276	57.98%
Others	76	15.96%

5.2 Frequency of eWOM platform usage

Table 2 displays the millennials' usage pattern of the eWOM platforms for reading reviews before purchase decisions related to the hotel's products and services.

Table 2: Frequency of reading online reviews before the purchase decision

Category	N:476	Frequency (in %)
1-3 times	135	28.36 %
4-6 times	196	41.17%
7-9 times	82	17.22%
10 times or more	63	13.23%

5.3 Preferred source(s) of hotel information

Table 3 displays the distribution chart of the preferred eWOM platform amongst the millennials for acquiring the information related to various products and services of the hotel.

Table 3: Preferred source(s) of hotel information

Category	N:476	Frequency (in %)
Hotel websites	43	9.0%
Travel review sites (TripAdvisor, Booking.com etc.)	286	60%
Social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn etc.)	103	21.6%
Personal travel blogs	24	5.04%
Travel agency	8	1.6%
Other (please specify)	12	2.52%

5.4 Measurement model

Internal consistency, convergent validity and discriminant validity were tested in order to examine the reliability and validity of construct measurement. The internal consistency was determined through Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR) indices. The alpha value of each construct ranged from 0.81 to 0.96, thus fulfilling the minimum criteria of 0.7. On the other hand, each construct's CR ranged between 0.82 to 0.94. The recommended CR values are more

than 0.70 to provide adequate model reliability (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988), thus satisfying the internal consistency criteria.

As per Fornell, C., and Larcker (1981) recommendation of a minimum 0.50 limit for convergent validity, the present study found that the average variance extracted (AVE) ranges from 0.54 to 0.84. In addition, ASV and MSV were also calculated, which should be less than AVE (Segars, 1997) (kindly refer to table 5 for more details). The factor loadings of all the questions, as shown in table 4, indicates that each item loading fulfils the minimum criteria.

The discriminant validity test (shown in Table 6) followed Fornell, C., and Larcker (1981) criteria. It states the square roots of the AVE for each construct to be more significant than the correlation coefficients between any other construct.

Table 4: Standardised factor loading

Factors	Items	Factor loading
Information quality (INQ)	IQ1: The reviews available on the eWOM platform are correct.	0.815
	IQ2: The reviews available in the eWOM platform sufficiently complete my requirements.	0.861
	IQ3: The reviews available on the eWOM platform are relevant.	0.893
	IQ4: The reviews available on the eWOM platform are up-to-date.	0.828
	IQ5: The reviews available on the eWOM platform are well structured.	0.858
Source credibility (SC)	SC1: People who write reviews on the eWOM platform are knowledgeable in evaluating the quality of hotel products and services.	0.717
	SC2: People who write reviews on the eWOM platform related to hotel products and services are honest.	0.792
	SC3: People who write reviews on the eWOM platform are sincere.	0.79
	SC4: People who write reviews on the eWOM platform are experts.	0.654

Perceived curiosity fulfilment (PCF)	PCF1: My imagination for hotel products and services develops when I use the eWOM platform.	0.91
	PCF2: Interacting with this eWOM platform makes me curious about searching for more hotels.	0.968
	PCF3: Reading reviews of other reviewers on the eWOM platform excites my curiosity.	0.885
Enjoyment (ENJ)	ENJ1: Using the eWOM platform creates fun.	0.721
	ENJ2: It was delightful to use the eWOM platform.	0.705
	ENJ3: It was exciting to interact with other experts on the eWOM platform.	0.737
	ENJ4: Using the eWOM platform is very boring.	0.813
Visual presentation (VP)	VP1: My experience with the eWOM platform having visual presentation of hotel products was enjoyable.	0.96
	VP2: I give full concentration to the eWOM platform with the hotel products' visual presentation.	0.966
	VP3: The visual presentation of hotel products available on the eWOM platform generates my curiosity to stay in that hotel.	0.941
	VP4: The visual presentation in the eWOM platform inspire me to explore more information about hotel products.	0.865
Perceived ease of use (PEOU)	PEOU1: I find the eWOM platform easy to use.	0.838
	PEOU2: My interaction with the eWOM platform is clear and understandable.	0.903
	PEOU3: Operating the eWOM platform is easy for me.	0.889
	PEOU4: Using the eWOM platform facilitates me to become skilful.	0.838
Perceived usefulness (PU)	PU1: The eWOM platform enhances my knowledge of hotel products and services.	0.694
	PU2: The eWOM platform facilitates me to get information quickly regarding hotel products and services.	0.734
	PU3: The eWOM platform assists me in getting hotel products and services information more efficiently.	0.82

	PU4: The eWOM platform assists me in making hotel booking decisions more efficiently.	0.834
Purchase decision (PD)	PD1: After using the eWOM platform, it is good to make an online purchase decision for hotel products and services.	0.899
	PD2: After using the eWOM platform, I have the intention to purchase hotel products and services.	0.913
	PD3: After using the eWOM platform, I am optimistic about making an online booking for hotel products and services.	0.87
	PD4: I will definitely refer eWOM platform before making any decision for hotel products and services in the near future.	0.76

Table 5: Convergent reliability and validity

Constructs	Items	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
Information quality (INQ)	INQ1	0.929	0.929	0.725	0.373	0.186
	INQ2					
	INQ3					
	INQ4					
	INQ5					
Source credibility (SC)	SC1	0.818	0.829	0.549	0.373	0.201
	SC2					
	SC3					
	SC4					
Perceived ease of use (PEOU)	PEOU1	0.923	0.924	0.752	0.154	0.096
	PEOU2					
	PEOU3					
	PEOU4					
Perceived curiosity fulfilment (PCF)	PCF1	0.943	0.944	0.849	0.164	0.118
	PCF2					
	PCF3					
Enjoyment (ENJ)	ENJ1	0.830	0.833	0.555	0.267	0.157
	ENJ2					
	ENJ3					
	ENJ4					
Visual presentation (VP)	VP1	0.965	0.965	0.873	0.296	0.158
	VP2					
	VP3					
	VP4					
Perceived usefulness (PU)	PU1	0.853	0.858	0.602	0.317	0.226
	PU2					
	PU3					
	PU4					
Purchase decision (PD)	PD1	0.918	0.921	0.745	0.281	0.152
	PD2					
	PD3					
	PD4					

Table 6: Discriminant validity

	PD	INQ	ENJ	SC	VP	PEOU	PCF	PU
PD	**0.863**							
INQ	0.319	**0.851**						
ENJ	0.342	0.504	**0.746**					
SC	0.289	0.611	0.517	**0.741**				
VP	0.530	0.337	0.281	0.401	**0.934**			
PEOU	0.335	0.245	0.194	0.299	0.393	**0.867**		
PCF	0.303	0.335	0.383	0.342	0.345	0.279	**0.922**	
PU	0.529	0.536	0.447	0.563	0.443	0.375	0.405	**0.776**

5.5 Structural model

The proposed research model was validated and analysed using SEM. The research model fit indices (table 7) shows that all values fall above the minimum criteria. The hypothesised relationship among various factors was examined, as shown in Fig. 2 and table 8. The perceived usefulness of the eWOM platform is significantly predicted by information quality (β=0.22, $p < 0.01$), source credibility (β=0.21, $p < 0.01$), perceived ease of use (β=0.14, $p < 0.01$), enjoyment (β=0.11, $p < 0.05$), perceived curiosity fulfillment (β=0.12, $p < 0.01$) and visual presentation (β=0.19, $p < 0.01$). Further, the perceived usefulness of the eWOM platform has a significant and positive effect on the purchase decisions related to hotel products and services among the millennials (β=0.56, $p < 0.01$). The R^2 (coefficient of determination) describes the amount of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variable. The R^2 with a high value predicts the improvement in the model. The eWOM platform characteristics can explain 48 per cent of the variance in the perceived usefulness of the eWOM platforms, whereas the perceived usefulness of the eWOM platforms can explain 31 per cent of the variance in the millennials' purchase decisions.

In addition, the present study has analysed the moderating impact of gender on the different relationships by applying the bootstrapping method in IBM AMOS 23(see table 9). The study identifies that the relationship between source credibility and the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms is moderated by gender (z score = 2.341 > 1.96). It is found that source credibility is more important for female millennials (β = 0.294) than males (β = 0.084). While studying the relationship between perceived curiosity fulfilment and perceived usefulness of the eWOM platforms, it is found that gender plays a significant moderating role (z score = -1.783 < -1.64).

The analysis shows that the perceived curiosity fulfilment is more important to the male gender (β = 0.213) than females (β = 0.084). While studying the moderating impact of gender on the relationship between enjoyment and perceived usefulness of the eWOM platforms (z score = 2.34 > 1.96), it was found that female millennials give more importance to curiosity fulfilment (β = 0.007) as compared to male counterparts (β = -0.038). Additionally, the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness of the eWOM platforms (z score = 2.499 > 1.96) states that female millennials are more inclined towards the perceived ease of use (β = 0.234) than male millennials (β = 0.068).

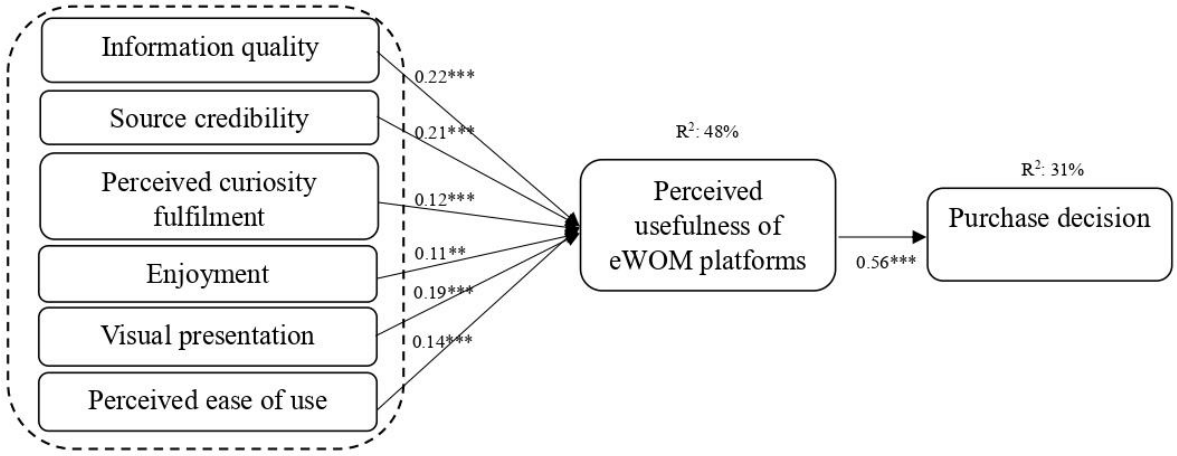
Furthermore, the moderating role of gender was also studied on the relationship between the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms and the purchase decision of millennials. The results findings conclude that there is no significant moderating impact of gender on the relationship between the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms and purchase decision of the millennials in context to various products and services offered by the hotel.

Table 7: Goodness of fit indices

Fit Index	Limit	Actual Values	References	Acceptability
Absolute Fit Indices				
χ^2		863.562		
df		436		
p value	>0.05	.000		Yes
χ^2 / df	1.00-5.00	1.981	(Kline, 2015)	Yes
RMR	<0.08	.032	(L. Hu and Bentler, 1999)	Yes
GFI	>0.90	.90	(Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993)	Yes
AGFI	>0.80	.877	(Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993)	Yes
Relative Fit Indices				
NFI	>0.80	.932	(P. M. Bentler and Bonett, 1980)	Yes
PNFI	>0.50	.819	(P. M. Bentler and Bonett, 1980)	Yes
IFI	>0.90	.965	(Bollen, 1990)	Yes
TLI	>0.90	.960	(Tucker and Lewis, 1973)	Yes
Non-Centrality Based Indices				
CFI	>0.90	.965	(Byrne, 2001)	Yes
PGFI	>0.50	.848	(James *et al.*,1982)	Yes
RMSEA	<0.08	.045	(Steiger, 1990)	Yes

Table 8: Hypothesis testing results

	Coefficient (β)	Estimate	SE.	CR.	P	Label
ENJ →PU	0.11	0.112	0.044	1.988	0.047	Accepted
INQ → PU	0.22	0.216	0.052	3.85	***	Accepted
SC → PU	0.21	0.213	0.061	3.366	***	Accepted
VP → PU	0.19	0.187	0.026	4.057	***	Accepted
PEOU → PU	0.14	0.145	0.038	3.226	0.001	Accepted
PCF → PU	0.12	0.121	0.038	2.641	0.008	Accepted
PU → PD	0.56	0.557	0.075	10.552	***	Accepted



** Significant at 95%; *** Significant at 99%

Figure 2: Structural model result

Table 9: Moderation results

		Male		Female				
Hypothesis	**Path**	**Estimate**	**P-value**	**Estimate**	**P-value**	**Z ratio**	**Results**	**Supported at**
H8a	INQ → PU	0.141	0.033	0.154	0.011	-0.238	Not moderated	--
H8b	SC → PU	0.084	0.238	0.294	***	2.341	Moderated	95%
H8c	PCF → PU	0.213	***	0.084	0.123	-1.783	Moderated	90%
H8d	ENJ → PU	-0.038	0.553	0.16	0.007	2.34	Moderated	95%
H8e	VP → PU	0.196	0.002	0.112	0.034	-1.104	Not moderated	--
H8f	PEOU → PU	0.068	0.278	0.234	***	2.499	Moderated	95%
H8g	PU → PD	0.321	***	0.484	***	0.712	Not moderated	--

6. Discussion and conclusion

6.1 Discussion

The relevance of the eWOM platforms in the hospitality business is rapidly increasing in tandem with the service characteristic (Racherla et al., 2013). The present study results revealed that the millennials usually adapt those eWOM platforms that cover various characteristics such as information quality, source credibility, enjoyment, perceived curiosity fulfilment, visual presentation, and ease of use. Information quality tends to be the strongest predictor of millennials' adoption of information and its source for their purchase decisions related to hotel products and services. The present study findings synchronise with the results of the previous studies, which postulates that those eWOM platforms delivering qualitative information support individual decision making (Erkan and Evans, 2016). When travellers acquire quality eWOM from an eWOM platform website, they feel the website's usefulness (Wang and Li, 2019).

Source credibility is the second most influential attribute of the eWOM platform in the current study. The finding is in tune with the result of the previous studies, concluding that source credibility has a positive relationship with an outlook towards information (Matute et al., 2016).

Thus, we may postulate that the millennials rely heavily on those eWOM platforms for their online hotel bookings when they start believing that the information available within a particular eWOM platform is posted by credible reviewers.

Visual presentation is the third important construct in perceiving the usefulness of the eWOM platforms and the behavioural intention of the millennials. The current findings reconfirm previous study findings, which describe the role of visual presentation as an effective way of remembering information by individuals (Blanco et al., 2010), which leads to a positive attitude (Adaval et al., 2018) and enhances an individual's decision-making process (Lurie and Mason, 2007). The present study also confirms that millennials prioritise the eWOM platforms that showcase textual information and visual presentation.

Perceived ease of use is another influential factor in the study, which indicates that when millennials find the effortless use of the website for information search, they considerably perceive the usefulness of the eWOM platforms. The finding contrasts with the results of the previous study done by Fard and Marvi (2019).

The analysis also concludes that perceived curiosity fulfilment and enjoyment factors also play an essential role in determining the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms. When millennials cannot retrieve relevant information for their decision making, their curiosity level automatically develops among them. The curiosity level gets fulfilled when an individual finds the relevant information from a website (Wang and Li, 2019). On the same note, the present study findings conclude that fulfilling the curiosity level among millennials will also outline the usefulness of the eWOM platform. On the other hand, millennials heightened their pleasure and experienced affective perception when they read reviews and visualised pictures and videos of hotel accommodation posted by other reviewers. This shows that the millennials give significant

weightage to enjoyment while using the eWOM platforms. Furthermore, perceived usefulness was found to significantly affect the purchase decision of the millennials related to hotel products and services. When millennials perceive that the eWOM platform is noteworthy because of all the discussed characteristics discussed above, the probability of using a particular eWOM platform for their purchase decision is very high.

Most importantly, the present study found the moderating impact of gender in the relationship between 1.) source credibility and perceived usefulness of the eWOM platforms, 2.) perceived curiosity fulfilment and perceived usefulness of the eWOM platforms, 3.) enjoyment and perceived usefulness of the eWOM platforms, 4.) perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness of the eWOM platforms.

Furthermore, the study found no moderating role of gender while studying the relationship between information quality and perceived usefulness of the eWOM platforms and visual presentation and the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms. Additionally, the analysis result in the present study also reveals that the acceptance of the eWOM platforms and purchase decisions related to hotel products and services is not moderated by gender. The result supports earlier studies other studies that identify no difference among gender-based effects on usefulness and behavioural intention (Kim, 2016; Tan and Ooi, 2018). However, the current findings contradict the studies on technology adoption in various contexts that found a stronger relationship between perceived usefulness and technology adoption for males than females (Assaker, 2020).

6.2 Conclusion

In recent years, the development of new web applications has shifted the features of websites toward more participative, interactive, and user-centric eWOM platforms. This has led to

more usage of the eWOM platform in the decision making of the millennials. The present study has fulfilled four research objectives:

1. The study reveals that the characteristics of the eWOM platforms that motivate the millennials to indulge are information quality, source credibility, perceived curiosity fulfilment, enjoyment, visual presentation and perceived ease of use.
2. These characteristics play an important role in perceiving the usefulness of the eWOM platforms by the millennials in India.
3. The study also concludes the moderation effect of gender between the impact of stimulus constructs (such as source credibility, perceived curiosity fulfilment, enjoyment and perceived ease of use) on the perceived usefulness of eWOM platforms.

The population growth of millennials in India is on a significant rise, with this generation driving a change in the global consumer market. The present study appears to be the first study on investigating the eWOM platform characteristics that influence millennials in India in their decision making related to hotel products and services. Businesses or organisations can leverage this information to incorporate these unique aspects of eWOM platforms that will engage millennials in India, further increasing the effectiveness of their marketing efforts. Additionally, the current study contributes to our understanding of the eWOM platform's hedonic values, which play a significant role in assessing the eWOM's utility beyond its functioning.

6.3 Theoretical implications

Firstly, the study presents a theoretical contribution by bridging consumer behaviour, hotel booking, and the eWOM platform literature from a millennials traveller perspective and contributing to a better understanding of the S-O-R through an understanding of eWOM platforms. While previous studies have been done from the perspective of eWOM content (Fard and Marvi,

2019; Matute et al., 2016), the current study proposes relevant eWOM platform characteristics and how these characteristics influence millennials' decision-making process in the context of hotel products and services. The present study demonstrates that contemporary decision-making is not static or occurs in isolation but is influenced by the perceived usefulness of the eWOM platforms. This study contributes significantly to understanding the factors that influence the millennials' perception of the usefulness of eWOM platforms. The outcomes of this study demonstrate that the information quality, source credibility, perceived curiosity fulfilment, enjoyment, perceived ease of use and visual presentation have a substantial effect on how millennials perceive the usefulness of the eWOM platforms.

From the methodological perspective, the present study contributes to the hospitality literature by establishing measurement scales for the eWOM platform research. Given the increasing relevance of eWOM platforms in the hospitality industry, these measures can provide a foundation for future research. Additional testing of the measuring scales is necessary for future studies to strengthen their validity. The measures could be adapted to deal with the singularities of the eWOM platforms.

6.4 Practical implications

The increasing demand of the digital natives for hospitality products and services in India has allowed numerous online information providing channels to compete with each other and grab the customers' attention. The present study will provide noteworthy understandings to practitioners, website designers and hospitality businesses as to how to engage millennial travellers in the eWOM platforms better.

The present study shows that the user-generated content in the eWOM platform influences the millennials' engagement and their decision making for hotel products and services. The finding

will assist hospitality professionals in understanding the iterative nature of the millennials' behaviour process and understanding how eWOM attributes of the eWOM platform influence the millennials, leading them to search in the eWOM platforms and take decisions.

The hospitality businesses should develop a virtual platform where the millennials could freely access to post their reviews during the journey and post-journey. By providing updated and qualified information, the usability of these social platforms will increase. They may incentivise the reviewers to post quality reviews by offering them rewards. Meanwhile, the marketers can also validate the reviewers' credentials by linking their profiles within the eWOM platform, which will generate trust among the users.

This study indicates that millennial travellers use eWOM platforms to imagine the experience of staying in the hotel by visualising static images and videos. As the hotel industry deals with intangible products and services, the marketers need to focus more on sharing information with the additional support of videos and images of the hotel.

Businesses and organisations should also focus on the hedonic features of the eWOM platform besides its functional attributes. The inclusion of virtual reality applications or 360-degree support systems in the eWOM platform will enhance the enjoyment and fulfil the curiosity among millennials while using a particular eWOM platform, further leading to positive decision-making.

6.5 Limitations and direction for future research

Apart from theoretical and practical implications, the present study also has some limitations. The sample respondents in the present study were millennials from India. Future studies should focus on the other demographic profiles and geographical areas.

Secondly, the study undertakes the perceived usefulness of the eWOM platform in the context of hotel products and services. Further studies could focus on the comparison within different categories of hotels or may be used in the context of restaurants or other allied sectors.

Thirdly, the study addresses all eWOM platforms in general. The field of eWOM platforms is constantly evolving; hence future research can include the examination of a specific eWOM platform. Moreover, the present study uses the purposive sampling method. As a result, generalisations of the outcomes should be made with full caution.

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